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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000686

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DEPT FOR DRL, INL, EUR/SCE  
NSC FOR BRAUN  
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EUR/ACE FOR DMAYHEW

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TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PHUM](#) [SOCI](#) [KV](#) [UNMIK](#)  
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: USOP WORKS TO REASSURE STRPCE SERBS

REF: PRISTINA 612

Classified By: CHIEF OF MISSION TINA KAIDANOW FOR REASONS 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. Nestled in the Shar mountains, Strpce municipality - the southernmost Serb-majority area in Kosovo - holds great potential for economic development, but is also faced with several critical issues: delayed privatization of a potentially lucrative ski area that has stalled economic development, troubles with the electricity supply, mistrust of ethnic Albanian police officers fueled by a excessive use of force during a recent raid, and an illegal construction problem in its choicest location. USOP will continue to weigh in with Kosovo's leaders and institutions to make certain that this important Serb community's equities are protected. END SUMMARY.

BREZOVICA: GREAT EXPECTATIONS FINALLY BEING MET?

¶2. (C) Unlike other Serb-majority areas in Kosovo, Strpce possesses a solid base for future economic development. The Yugoslav-era Brezovica ski resort, despite needing private capital for a necessary modernization, holds great potential to become a pillar of the local economy and an engine for further development. The privatization process, stalled for various reasons, has caused significant frustration among Strpce's citizens, who suffer from high unemployment. Many local Serbs, such as moderate former mayor Sladjan Ilic, Deputy Mayor Slavisa Staletovic, and municipal CEO Radica Grbic, along with international actors, place significant responsibility for this at the feet of current Mayor Stanko Jakovljevic, a member of the Serbian Socialist Party (SPS), who also serves as a leader of Belgrade's Coordinating Council for Kosovo (CCK). Jakovljevic's historic opposition to this privatization, premised on the notion that the Serb community might lose control over Brezovica to Kosovar Albanian investors, caused UN/DPKO to reconsider its commitment to the resort's privatization and place a moratorium on the process in late 2006.

¶3. (C) Despite both his traditional reluctance and UN DPKO's hesitation, Jakovljevic signed an MOU on May 28 with the SRSG and Kosovo Trust Agency (KTA) that would allow the Brezovica

privatization process to go forward, though for unknown reasons he never disclosed this action to other senior municipal officials in Strpce, including Staletovic and Grbic. At a recent lunch in late August with USOP and USAID, Grbic reacted with surprise upon hearing that such an agreement existed. She later told poloff she was shocked that such an important issue could be kept secret. We urged both her and Staletovic to support privatization of the resort, which would help revitalize the community. (Note: USOP is not a signatory to this document. In early September, we received a copy of a cable from UN/DPKO confirming that DPKO had agreed to restore the Brezovica ski area to the KTA privatization list. KTA subsequently publicly announced this agreement. Only then did this MOU and Jakovljevic's role in it become evident to Strpce citizens. On September 18, KTA's Board of Directors is expected to confirm Brezovica's placement on the list. End Note.)

#### POWER CUTS

14. (C) Interruptions in the electricity supply are another hardship. As with other Serb enclaves in Kosovo, local residents have not paid KEK for energy since 1999 and do not receive bills. On July 25, the Kosovo Electricity Company (KEK) disconnected the ski resort for non-payment; cellphone towers providing service to Strpce residents had been illegally connected to the resort's lines and also lost power, cutting off coverage in the area (see reftel). Elektro-Privreda Serbia (EPS) employees resident in the municipality reconnected power, but refused to deal directly with KEK. On August 21 USOP and USAID discussed these issues with Staletovic, who claimed that Strpce residents want to

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pay their electricity bills and proposed having the municipality, and not KEK, collect payments. Acknowledging that it had been a long time since anyone paid for service in Strpce, he claimed that "after a few months, no one will complain anymore." (Note: We have pledged to work with the municipality and KEK to discuss ways to facilitate such a payment system. End Note.)

#### POLICE RAID

15. (C) A recent raid by ethnic Albanian police officers has also had an unfortunate effect upon local attitudes. On April 18, about 150 Kosovo Albanian and international police officers stormed Kosovo Serb Milan Mirkovic's residence in Strpce in the early morning in search of drugs and weapons. The police found neither and were accused by the Serb family of having used excessive force; the four men in the Mirkovic home at the time of the raid -- Milan Mirkovic, his two sons Nicola and Jovan, and Dragan Ilic, a friend who was spending the night -- claim that the police assaulted them, and an UNMIK Police press release, dated April 19, acknowledges as much (despite later denials to COM and others by UNMIK police commissioner Monk). The document details numerous injuries to all four, including bruises, cuts, swelling, etc.

16. (C) The raid, which was not cleared by either the KPS or UNMIK Police leadership, was the culmination of a botched narcotics investigation that, according to internal KPS reports shared with USOP, relied on intelligence dating back to August 2006. Immediately after the incident, USOP met with UNMIK Police Commissioner Richard Monk and KPS Deputy Commissioner Sheremet Ahmeti to register our strong concern over the conduct of the operation. Monk and Ahmeti both acknowledged that the raid was flawed, and Ahmeti admitted that the police used excessive force. They promised to investigate the operation and punish anyone found guilty of wrongdoing. We also used the raid to press the KPS to enact standard operating procedures for dealing with inter-ethnic crimes to prevent a repeat of this kind of incident.

17. (C) The impact of the raid continues to ripple through

Strpce. In a conversation with poloff July 26, three months after it took place, municipal CEO Grbic pointed to the raid and its aftermath as a significant problem affecting the municipality. She emphasized the excessively large number of police involved, the violence with which the raid was carried out, the failure to discover any criminal activity in the house that was raided, and the physical and psychological abuse heaped on the suspects. She claimed that Mirkovic had withdrawn his complaint against the police after threats made by Albanian KPS officers during the 72-hour detention period and, later, over the telephone. Grbic's opinions on the raid were seconded by former mayor Ilic, who told poloff that the international KPS and CivPol personnel present at the raid simply watched and did not intervene to stop what he termed "a violation of human rights."

#### WEEKEND ZONE

18. (C) The situation surrounding the so-called "Weekend Zone," a picturesque area near Strpce's Brezovica ski resort, poses yet another challenge. The mayor has complained for years about illegal construction taking place there; the builders are Albanians, some of them high-level political figures, who lack permits from the municipality. The mayor and other locals, including Grbic, believe that Albanians intend to use the Weekend Zone as a lever to wedge Serbs out of Strpce. The municipality took 26 cases of illegal construction to court in 2006; each case was delayed and then decided in favor of the construction companies. In 2007, 17 cases were sent to the municipal court; to date, none have been tried. UNMIK civpol Strpce rep (and Amcit) Teresa Pyle told a KFOR Liaison Monitoring Team on July 24 that many locals suspect the municipal court judge Adam Huseni of having his own reasons for delaying the cases - he himself reportedly has a residence in the Weekend Zone.

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19. (C) In the interim, construction has continued unabated; Ilic said that many houses in the Weekend Zone have been constructed very quickly in order to establish "facts on the ground" before the municipality can take action. One KPS report says that the Municipal Department of Urbanization taped off a construction site July 7, only to find a week later that the tape had been removed and construction had resumed. In early July, Jakovljevic asked the Municipal Assembly to pass a decree establishing a vehicle inspection point to prevent more construction materials from entering the area. This was done on July 12, manned 24 hours a day by staff of the Department of Urbanization. The installation consists of a guard booth and a drop bar extending two-thirds of the way across the road, which is kept raised until a truck arrives (the bar is lowered at night but cars can easily move around it). To date, the inspectors have stopped a small number of trucks with construction materials, turning them around when the drivers failed to produce the necessary construction permits. USKFOR, OSCE, and CivPol chief Pyle all told poloff that they view the mayor's use of the democratic process as a positive development, and consider the unobtrusive access point an effective way of dealing with the illegal construction problem.

#### REASSURANCE FROM USOP

110. (C) During a USOP-hosted lunch with Staletovic and Grbic August 21, we described our pressure on the KPS in the wake of the April raid to formulate and implement standard operating procedures (SOPs) for police actions involving minority communities, particularly Serbs. (Note: We have already provided comments to UNMIK and the KPS on these SOPs, which we believe must mandate the operational participation of KPS officers from the same minority group as the subjects of the police action, as well as require approval in advance from the UNMIK police leadership. End Note.) Regarding the Weekend Zone, we explained to Grbic and Staletovic that we did not view stopping construction materials for illegal

building sites as a barrier to free movement, so long as normal traffic was not disrupted and people were not harassed.

#### COMMENT

¶11. (C) Of all the Serb-majority areas in Kosovo, Strpce -- with its ski resort and alpine tourist potential -- holds the most promise for providing the economic undergirding to allow Serbs to remain and perhaps even flourish. Strpce provides a good example of the frustrations and mistrust that both ethnic communities feel towards each other, as well; Albanians rail against the free provision of electricity to Serb residents while Serbs decry the illegal construction of homes in their municipality by politically-connected Albanians. Both have legitimate issues at stake, and need to communicate more frequently with international mediation to help resolve some of the problems. USOP will continue to weigh in with the leadership of Kosovar Albanian-led institutions, like the KPS, KEK and others, to make certain this important Serb community's equities are protected.

KAIDANOW